

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 DAMASC 08644 181335Z
ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SY-05 MCT-01 PM-04 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15
PRS-01 CIAE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 IO-13 /064 W
----- 056851 /43

R 181237Z DEC 76
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 989
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
DIA WASHDC

S E C R E T DAMASCUS 8644

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS, SY
SUBJECT: POLITICAL CAMPAIGN AGAINST RIF'AT AL-ASAD

1. SUMMARY. RUMOR THAT RIF'AT AL-ASAD ORGANIZED ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT AGAINST FONMIN KHADDAM ON TONGUES OF MANY DAMASCENES. SOME REJECT THEORY OUT OF HAND, BUT PRIMIN KHULAYFAWI REPORTEDLY FINDS IT CREDIBLE. PRES. ASAD REPORTEDLY PLEDGED FULL SUPPORT FOR HIS BROTHER TO BAATH PARTY REGIONAL COMMAND AFTER DISPUTE BROKE OUT BETWEEN RIF'AT AND SOME SENIOR BAATHIST OFFICIALS. WE FIND IT HARD TO BELIEVE RIF'AT INVOLVED IN KHADDAM ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT AND SPECULATE THAT RIF'AT MAY CURRENTLY BE TARGET OF POLITICAL CAMPAIGN TO NEUTRALIZE HIS INFLUENCE WITHIN REGIME. END SUMMARY.

2. RUMOR IS RIFE IN DAMASCUS THAT PRES. ASAD'S BROTHER RIF'AT, BAATH PARTY REGIONAL COMMAND MEMBER AND COMMANDER OF DEFENSE COMPANIES, IS RESPONSIBLE FOR RECENT ATTEMPTED ASSASSINATION OF FONMIN KHADDAM. MANY SYRIANS DISCOUNT THIS THEORY. FOR EXAMPLE, LOCAL DOCTOR TOLD
SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 02 DAMASC 08644 181335Z

AMBASSADOR THAT RIF'AT TOO OPEN A PERSONALITY TO HAVE FEIGNED SENSE OF OUTRAGE HE DISPLAYED BEFORE THE RESIDENT ON DUTY AT LOCAL HOSPITAL WHEN KHADDAM BROUGHT IN. ACCORDING TO SOME SOURCES, PRIME SUSPECT IS SYRIAN CITIZEN NAMED MAHMUD AL-KHATIB, WHO HAS NOT YET BEEN APPREHENDED. OTHERS CLAIM GROUP OF MUSLIM EXTREMISTS

FROM HAMA MAY BE INVOLVED. AS ONE SOURCE NOTED, "THEIR SENSE OF GRIEVANCE AGAINST ALAWITES, CENTRAL AUTHORITY, MODERNISM -- IN FACT JUST ABOUT EVERYTHING -- SEEMS TO BE LIMITLESS."

3. SOME POLITICAL INSIDERS, HOWEVER, ASSIGN MORE CREDIBILITY TO RUMOR ABOUT RIF'AT. REGULAR SOURCE RELATED CONVERSATION BETWEEN WELL-PLACED SUB-SOURCE AND PRIMIN KHULAYFAWI IN WHICH PRIMIN REPORTEDLY STATED THAT RIF'AT WAS ORGANIZER OF ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT AND THAT INCIDENT MARKED EFFORT BY RIF'AT TO INTIMIDATE HIS OPPONENTS.

4. WE HAVE ALSO PICKED UP FURTHER DETAILS OF RIF'AT'S ACTIVITIES FROM REGULAR SOURCE WHO REPORTS ON DISSIDENT ACTIVITIES. DAMASCUS 8116 REPORTED THIS SOURCE'S COMMENT THAT RIF'AT HAD ACCUSED REGIONAL COMMAND DEPSEC GEN MUHAMMAD JABIR BAJBUJ OF WORKING WITH NAJI JAMIL AND MUSTAFA TLASS TO FORM SECTARIAN POWER BLOC, AND THAT PRES. ASAD HAD FORMED HIGHLEVEL RC COMMITTEE TO INVESTIGATE ACCUSATIONS. SOURCE RECENTLY INFORMED US THAT PRES. TOLD MEMBERS OF RC THAT HE CONSIDERED ATTACK ON HIS BROTHER TO BE ATTACK UPON HIMSELF, AND ADDED THAT HE WOULD NOT BE DECEIVED BY ATTEMPTS TO UNDERMINE HIS OWN POSITION BY STRIKING AT RIF'AT.

5. THIS SOURCE WENT ON TO DESCRIBE RIF'AT AS THE ONLY PERSON PRES. ASAD REALLY TRUSTS. A CLOSE ASSOCIATE OF DR. ASAD ALSO TOLD EMBOFF SOME TIME AGO RIF'AT HAS REAL AFFECTION FOR HIS BROTHER AND SHOULD NOT BE CONSIDERED RIVAL TO PRES., ALTHOUGH HE SUGGESTED RIF'AT WOULD PROBABLY
SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 03 DAMASC 08644 181335Z

TRY TO MAKE BID FOR POWER IF ANYTHING HAPPENED TO PRES. ASAD.

6. SAME SOURCE PARA 3 SUGGESTED THAT RIF'AT WAS "STRONGEST CARD UMRAN OFFICERS HAVE TO PLAY", BECAUSE THEY ARE UNTAINTED BY REPUTATION FOR CORRUPTION AND CAN UTILIZE DISCONTENT AGAINST RIF'AT TO GATHER SUPPORT AMONG OFFICERS IN PROCESS OF THEIR INTERNAL POLITICKING.

7. COMMENT: WE FIND IT HARD TO SWALLOW REPORTS THAT RIF'AT BEHIND KHADDAM ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT, DESPITE INFORMATION FROM HIGH-LEVEL SOURCE CONTAINED PARA TWO. VERY FACT OF RUMOR'S PERVASIVENESS, HOWEVER, AND WILLINGNESS OF LARGE PERCENTAGE OF DAMASCENES TO ACCEPT IT UNCRITICALLY IS INSTRUCTIVE. ON ONE HAND, IT INDICATES PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF RIF'AT AS REGIME'S RASPUTIN REMAIN UNALTERED. SECOND, CONNECTION BETWEEN ATTEMPT AGAINST KHADDAM AND ACCUSATION THAT RIF'AT AT THE PERPETRATOR OF THIS CRIME DOES NOT SEEM NATURAL. WE KNOW OF NO EXISTING

RIVALRY BETWEEN THE TWO SUCH AS EXISTS BETWEEN NAJI JAMIL AND RIF'AT. NOR DOES AMATEURISH "TWO MEN ON MOTORCYCLE" ATTACK SEEM TO US THE SORT OF OPERATION RIF'AT WOULD HAVE MOUNTED HAD HE REALLY WANTED TO GET KHADDAM.

8. WE MAY BE WITNESSING ORCHESTRATED CAMPAIGN ON PART OF RIF'AT'S OPPONENTS, WHO INCLUDE OFFICERS AND BAATH PARTY OFFICIALS, TO CUT HIM DOWN TO SIZE. THEN, TOO, IT MAY BE NOTHING MORE THAN A RESULT OF PUBLIC GRUMBLING OVER THE CURRENT PROBLEMS OF SYRIAN LIFE -- INFLATION, CORRUPTION, SLOWING DEVELOPMENT, ALAWITE INFLUENCE, AND THE LIKE. RIF'AT AL-ASAD HAS MADE HIMSELF THE SYMBOL OF MOST OF WHAT IS BAD ABOUT THRE REGIME AND NO CRIME IS TOO MONSTROUS FOR BELIEF WHEN ATTRIBUTED TO HIM. WE DOUBT, HOWEVER, THAT ANY SERIOUS WEAKENING OF HIS POWER AND INFLUENCE IS IN PROSPECT.
MURPHY

SECRET

NNN

Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: GOVERNMENT OVERTHROW, ALLEGATIONS, POLITICAL LEADERS, DISSIDENT FACTIONS, PLOTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 18 DEC 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: CunninFX
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976DAMASC08644
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760466-0193
From: DAMASCUS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19761230/aaaaazvu.tel
Line Count: 130
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: CunninFX
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 10 JUN 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <10 JUN 2004 by BoyleJA>; APPROVED <04 OCT 2004 by CunninFX>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: POLITICAL CAMPAIGN AGAINST RIF'AT AL-ASAD
TAGS: PINS, SY, (ASAD, HAFIZ), (AL-ASAD, RIF'AT)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006